

Springer Series in Electoral Politics

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Vasiliki Tsagkroni

Radicalisation and Crisis Management

Shifts of Radical Right Discourse



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Radicalisation and Crisis Management

Shifts of Radical Right Discourse

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Abbreviations

AfD	Alternative for Germany (<i>Alternative für Deutschland</i>)—Germany
ANEL	Independent Greeks (<i>Ανεξάρτητοι Έλληνες</i>)—Greece
CH	Chega! (<i>CHEGA!</i>)—Portugal
FPÖ	Austrian Freedom Party (<i>Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs</i>)—Austria
GD	Golden Dawn (<i>Χρυσή Αυγή</i>)—Greece
GS	Greek Solution (<i>Ελληνική Λύση</i>)—Greece
LN	Northern League (<i>Lega Nord</i>)—Italy
PS	Finns Party (<i>Perussuomalaiset</i>)—Finland
PVV	Party for Freedom (<i>Partij voor de Vrijheid</i>)—The Netherlands
VB	Flemish Interest (<i>Vlaams Belang</i>)—Belgium

Chapter 1

Introduction



Over time, empirical analyses of electoral trends have corroborated the assertion that the radical right has increasingly appealed to voters with identifiable social characteristics, while concurrently solidifying its multicultural dimensions. However, the contention that radical right parties merely serve as conduits for heterogeneous socio-political protests, though valid, has proven inadequate in explaining the sustained and progressively influential presence of this phenomenon within the political landscapes of numerous European nations. Indeed, while the radical right draws support from societal unrest and upheaval, its enduring trajectory suggests a deeper-rooted phenomenon that transcends opportunism and temporal exigencies. Moreover, as voter behaviour becomes increasingly erratic and institutional trust wanes, perceptions of establishment politics are further eroded, bolstering the appeal of extremist and radical ideologies. In response, radical right parties have demonstrated a remarkable adaptability, unencumbered by ideological constraints, adeptly tailoring their rhetoric, policies, and strategies to capitalise on prevailing political occasion.

Crises often serve as pivotal events, offering opportunities for reform and transformation. Following a crisis, there is heightened impetus for political actors to exhibit leadership, asserting control over unfolding events, reshaping existing paradigms, and charting new courses of action. Effective public leadership involves discerning present realities and identifying avenues for change. Consequently, crises create windows of opportunity for novel ideas and agendas to emerge, providing fertile ground for political exploitation. Within the discourse surrounding crisis exploitation, various narratives emerge, ranging from critiques of the status quo to organisational reforms and the promotion of alternative ideologies.

This book endeavours to intersect the discourse on radicalisation with crisis management, recognising that crises, including economic downturns, political upheavals such as Brexit, migration crises, and health pandemics, often engender fear and uncertainty, thereby catalysing radicalised rhetoric, particularly from the radical right. Focusing on the responses of radical right parties in Europe to these

crises, the book aims to elucidate the impact across four phases: the emergence of new radical right parties, shifts in the discourse of existing parties, and the decline or rejection of parties within this political spectrum and in this time frame.

In recent decades, crises spanning from economic, migratory, institutional, and health-related domains have emerged, that their enduring impacts yet to fully materialise. At the political level, crisis management plays a pivotal role not only in shaping contemporary discourse but also in determining the presence and performance of political actors. The radical right, consistently a polarising yet influential force since its inception, is a key focal point of this study, which seeks to explore how responses to crises shape the presence, discourse, and evolution of radical right parties. It also brings a comparative perspective by examining case studies with various traditions of radical right actors, presenting data on how crisis exploitation can assist in the exploring, reconsidering, bargaining, and learning on prospects of change of political parties.

While existing literature on crisis management often focuses on individual crises or public leadership dynamics (Hutter & Kriesi, 2019), or emphasises on the role of public leadership as a crisis emerges (Boin et al., 2016), this book provides a novel contribution by analysing the breakdown of various crises within the context of a specific political family. While much is written on the radical right (Ashe et al., 2020; Mudde, 2019; Rydgren, 2018), what is still missing from the literature is additional theories that explore this political phenomenon in terms of response to crisis per se. By systematically examining the emergence of political challenges and the exploitation of crises by the radical right, this study fills a notable gap in scholarship, offering empirical insights into crisis exploitation at the party level. Through comparative case studies encompassing diverse traditions of radical right actors, this book elucidates how crisis exploitation influences political strategies, opportunity-seeking behaviours, and the evolution of the radical right in the contemporary political landscape.

The analysis encompasses a case selection spanning eight countries, namely Austria, Belgium, Finland, Germany, Greece, Italy, Portugal, and the Netherlands. Within this framework, a total of ten political parties are examined, covering the period from 2009 to 2021. This temporal scope aligns with the emergence of four distinct crises. The primary data source utilised for this investigation is parliamentary debates. More specifically, a comprehensive analysis was conducted on a corpus of 805 parliamentary debates, each identified as being associated with a crisis. Within each empirical chapter of this study, an introductory section provides contextual background on the crisis under examination. Subsequently, the analysis delves into the empirical observations pertaining to the interpretation of the crisis by radical right parties, focusing on both its external and internal impacts. This examination encompasses considerations of severity, causality, and attributions of responsibility for the crisis. The analytical framework commences with an exploration of how radical right parties perceive and frame each crisis, elucidating the unfolding events, the manner in which they are being managed, and the resultant effects, implications, and concerns regarding institutional responses. Following this

elucidation, attention is directed towards an examination of the exit strategies proposed by these parties.

The selection of countries and crises has been meticulously curated to optimise the breadth of information available for analysis. This approach facilitates a comprehensive comparative perspective exploration, not only of the evolution of ideological stances and thematic emphases within radical right parties over time but also allows for an examination of how these facets are influenced within the diverse contexts of different crises. Such an approach not only facilitates the identification of nuanced differences in responses but also offers valuable insights into the diverse array of perspectives regarding crisis management strategies. Furthermore, this comparative framework serves to uncover and evaluate the efficacy of these responses when applied within varying crisis contexts. Therefore, through this strategic selection process, the analysis aims to elucidate patterns and trends, discerning the interplay between ideological shifts and crisis dynamics across varied national and temporal contexts.

The insights of such research are relevant not only for scholars on party politics and the radical right family, but also for a broad community of academics who are interested on radicalisation, crisis management, and political discourse, on various geographical contexts.

1.1 Outline of the Book

Chapter 2 clears up some of the theoretical debate and establishes the ground framework of what radical right is. Over the last few decades, the radical right has become a popular research topic in political science, mainly due to its increasing success. Moreover, the emergence, electoral success, and recent rapid growth of radical right parties in the political arena of numerous countries, even beyond the borderline of Western Europe, has led to crucial changes in their political establishment. Many scholars have argued that the post-war phenomenon of radical right appears in so-called waves and there have been four waves of radical right development to date. The chapter identifies several arguments on classifications of radical right and specifies the variables based on which radical right is defined.

Chapter 3 focuses on the theoretical underbrush by disclosing the basics of crisis management and underlying the arguments on crisis exploitation, most of which emerge from existing cases in practice in order to gain a more profound understanding of the role of crisis management, crisis communication, and competing frames during a crisis. This is particularly important as the existing literature uses different definitions of each, generating a pattern of talking past each other among competing positions. Additionally, the existing literature focuses on exploring events in direct line with reform in terms of policy but ignores reform in terms of political parties. For that reason, the chapter further specifies the scope of the book's argument on the importance of crisis in a political context. It concludes with a discussion of how crisis management shapes narratives during a crisis.